





A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF HEDGES
PATTERNS IN NEWSPAPER ARTICLES
WRITTEN BY NATIVE (AMERICAN) AND
NON-NATIVE (IRANIAN) SPEAKERS OF
ENGLISH

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF M.A.
IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE

By

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IN THE NAME OF GOD

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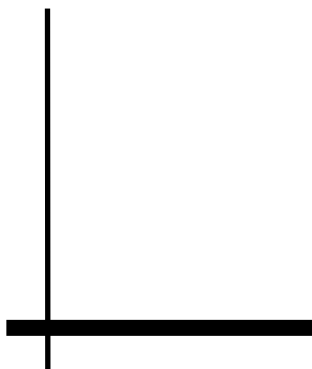


"We will either find a way, or make one."

-Hannibal

Dedicate to:

My family for their support and kindness



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Abstract

This study aims to explore the role that hedges play in the construction and attainment of persuasion. In a cross-linguistic perspective, two newspapers, the American “the Washington Post” and the Iranian “Iran Daily” were chosen, both because of their status, the political and rhetorical influence they exert in their respective national cultures. Based on the analysis of the textual and interpersonal markers found in a corpus of 50 editorial columns, 50 political articles and 50 economical articles written in English, this study aimed to identify which categories of hedges predominate by NNS and NS writing and how they are distributed according to cross-cultural or cross-linguistic preferences.

A comparison of the frequency figures of the hedges in this contrastive study showed some interdisciplinary differences in terms of frequency and forms of hedges. As the results of the current study indicate, the NSs and NNSs have shown some noticeable differences in the use of hedges. The NS writing contain a higher amount of hedges (6.93% by NSs and 3.77% by NNSs), whereas the relative overall number of hedges in NNS writing was about 2.71 % less than that in NSs. The results obtained indicate that hedging devices in NS articles are almost double those in NNS articles. This may suggest that there is a greater need to modulate discourse by being tentative, flexible and polite (i.e. hedging used as a negative politeness strategy) by NSs than in NNSs.

Keywords: Hedging, NSs (native speaker), NNs (non-native speakers), Economic articles, Political articles, Editorial articles, Contrastive analysis.

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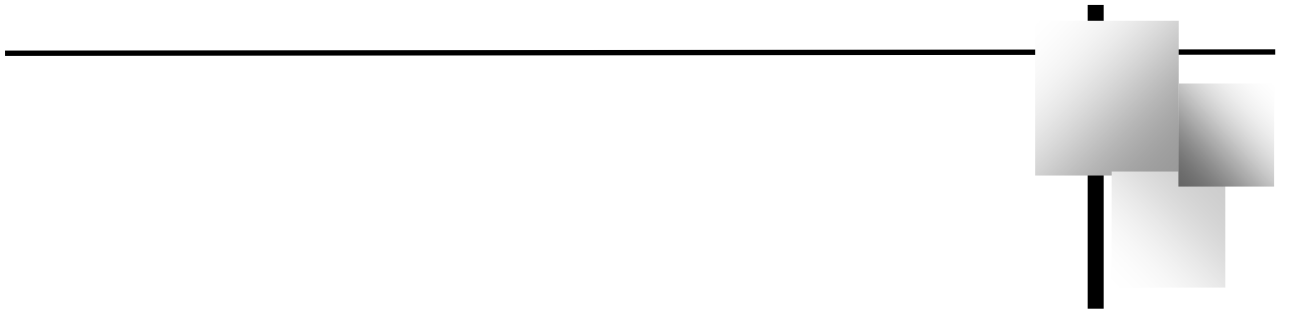
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Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

Despite its unique cross-cultural focus on writing and its well-meaning effort to facilitate second language learning, contrastive

rhetoric has tended to construct static, homogeneous, and apolitical images of the rhetorical patterns of various written languages. It has also implicitly reinforced an image of the superiority of English rhetoric and a deterministic view of second language (particularly English) learners as individuals who inevitably transfer rhetorical patterns of their L1 in L2 writing. Contrastive rhetoric researchers proposed various teaching techniques for helping students raise their awareness of English rhetorical conventions and develop their skills.

Although an extensive summary of major controversies within contrastive rhetoric research has recently been offered by Casanave (2004), arguments that question traditional contrastive rhetoric are largely ignored in the publications that support mainstream assumptions. For example, an article by Connor (2002), which offers an overview of new directions in contrastive rhetoric, touches on critical perspectives but mentions only some of the many arguments that have been advanced questioning the conventional wisdom of contrastive rhetoric-arguments that in fact provide important insights. A critical understanding of pedagogical

issues also provides an important theoretical direction for critical contrastive rhetoric.

The alternative views would enrich the conceptual basis of contrastive rhetoric, which has tended to perpetuate the Othering of languages other than English while by implication legitimating the superiority of English and to view writing merely as a reflection of cultural thought patterns rather than a social practice involving human agency. As applied to practice, critical contrastive rhetoric encourages teachers and students to critically reflect on classroom practices such as comparing and contrasting L1 and L2 rhetorical patterns and teaching/learning “preferred” discourse patterns of the target language and to reevaluate how these practices might reinforce cultural binaries and assimilations.

In the past few years more emphasis has been put on corpus-based analyses from a text linguistic perspective to complement those analyses of lexical and grammatical items or lexico-grammatical patterning carried out at the sentence-level. In this study our focus was based on newspapers as media which is accessible and familiar. A common perception of newspaper text is

that its main purpose is to present information in an objective and impersonal way, for example, with casual conversation, and the use of various devices to deflect attention away from the people's viewpoints; and focus on its outcomes. Newspaper discourse, and editorials columns in particular, can be considered “some of the most adequate examples of persuasive writing in all countries, setting standards for written persuasion” (Connor, 1996:143).

This study looks at the newspaper as corpora of study that can be used in class to improve students' reading and writing. In education, the focus seems to be on how newspapers can be used as authentic materials in the “English” classroom (Reah, 2002, and Sanderson, 1999). In other words, newspaper literacy privileges a more critical and dynamic reading that interrogates “*how* communication is situated; *why* communication is situated; *where* communication is situated; *when* communication is situated and *who* it is situated with and for” (Birch, 1999, p. 23).

According to our usage we can view newspaper writing from different perspectives, but in this study we just focused on hedging and observed how it varies in different genres (political, editorial

and economical articles). Hedges can be considered as the interactive elements which serve as a bridge between the propositional information in the text and the writer's factual interpretation. Hedges, typically, are expressed through the following taxonomy (Salager-Meyer, 1994):

- A. Modal auxiliary verbs (can, could, may...)
- B. Modal lexical verbs (to believe, to assume, to suggest...)
- C. Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases (possible, possibility possibly...)
- D. Aproximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time (roughly, about, often)
- E. Introductory phrases (I believe, we feel that.....)
- F. If clauses (if true, if anything)

The purpose of the newspaper literacy is to investigate the possibility of introducing an intervention program that might bring about change and improvements in the way students write. In the light of this insight, the present study tries to contrast newspapers

written in English by NSs and NNSs. The study tries to investigate the role of hedges in these newspapers' economic articles which deal with statistics, political articles which most of the time use vague words and editorials as a representative genre of persuasive mode of writing which is believed to be the most common mode in all languages (Connor, 1996).

1.2. Statement of the Problems

In spite of the widespread use of hedges in academic writing, this phenomenon is largely ignored in pedagogical materials geared to Non-Native Speakers (NNS) of English. Awareness of hedges leads to some improvement in both reading and writing. In order to get a general picture of the pattern of the use of hedges, it's better to do text analysis on different corpora representing different genres or compare native and non-native writing. The gap will prohibit taking steps toward improving students', researchers' and writers' writing by using hedges as an argumentative and persuasive skill.

Cultural difference has been a focus in second language research, particularly in teaching writing to the students of other languages. Contrastive rhetoric has investigated cultural differences in written discourse patterns or rhetorical conventions that might negatively affect writing in a second language (Connor, 1996). The hypotheses underlying the traditional approach to contrastive rhetoric are summarized as: (1) each language or culture has rhetorical conventions that are unique to itself; and (2) the rhetorical conventions of students' L1 interfere with their ESL writing (Grabe & Kaplan 1989; Kaplan, 1966, 1972, 1988).

Hedging appears to be an area which L2 students find problematic (Hyland 2000b, 1996b; Hyland and Tribble 1997) and often a neglected area in teaching (Curnick 2000; Hyland 2000b; 1996b).

Literature has also analyzed how hedging could be used pedagogically for teaching academic writing (Hyland 1998a Fowler 1991; Skelton 1988b) and some studies refer to pedagogical implications from the research carried out (Hyland and Tribble 1997; Hyland 1996b; 1996c; Salager-Meyer 1994; Skelton 1988a).

However, there is little attention to how it should be used in

teaching academic reading and hedging is mainly referred to in connection to writing (Hyland 1998a).

This study attempts to deal with newspaper articles in order to add to our knowledge of how such large texts are organized and to see how writers use particular linguistic features in particular ways to achieve their rhetorical purposes. One aim of the study is to assess the degrees of variation in hedging between articles written by Native Speakers (NSs), American, and those written by Non-Native Speakers (NNSs), Iranian, and also in uses of the linguistic features that are analyzed.

Although writing has always been problematic for NNS students there has been relatively little genre-analytic research into the newspaper articles, as a medium which is very popular. As yet, there is no study which compares newspaper articles written in different genre areas of both NNSs and NSs, and relates these uses to communicative purposes.

1.3. Significance of the Study